

Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials
November 17 – 18, 2009
Washington, DC
Minutes

Committee Members Present:

James Adams	Rose Elizabeth Lee
Les Beavers	Carl Kikerpill
Stan Brown	Thomas Lockhart
Wilfred Ebel	Donald Loudner
John (Jack) Kelly, Chairman	Joe Martory

Committee Members Absent:

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Brad Bennett, National Park Service
Jack Metzler, Jr., Arlington National Cemetery
Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission

Department of Veterans Affairs Attendees

Chief of Staff, John Gingrich
Staff Attorney and Deputy Ethics Official, Ellen H. Peterson
Acting Committee Management Officer, Vivian Drake

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Steve Muro
Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ron Walters
Associate Director, Office of Field Programs, Lindee Lenox
Director, State Cemetery Grants Program, Frank Salvas
Acting Director of Memorial Programs Service, Don Murphy
Deputy Director, Office of Construction Management, Bruce Borko
Director, Baltimore National Cemetery, Angela Nash
Designated Federal Officer, Chief, Communications and Outreach Support Division,
Mike Nacincik
Advisory Committee Program Manager, Robin Cooper

Public Attendees

Ian DePlanque, American Legion

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

The fall meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for FY 2010 was held in the Lafayette Room of the Hamilton Crowne Plaza at 14th and K Streets, Washington, DC.

Call to Order, Welcome, and Pledge of Allegiance

Committee Chairman Jack Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. He extended greetings for the belated Veterans Day holiday. Chairman Kelly welcomed new ex-officio member Brad Bennett for the National Park Service. The Committee members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Kelly then welcomed Administrative Announcements and a Status Report from the previous meeting from Ms. Cooper and Mr. Nacincik.

The Chairman then introduced the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Steve Muro; a man Chairman Kelly said brings real ideas to the table.

Remarks by the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Acting USMA Muro said he fully supports President Obama and Secretary Shinseki's mandate to transform VA into a 21st century organization. He reiterated the highest customer satisfaction index survey score of 95 of 100 ever awarded to a federal agency or private organization. The percentage of respondents that rated the quality of service received from VA cemetery staff as excellent was 95%. The percentage of respondents that rated the appearance of VA national cemeteries as excellent was 98%. And 98% would recommend a national cemetery to Veterans' families during their time of need. Mr. Muro voiced a real concern that despite these numbers, NCA and state veterans' cemeteries are providing services to only 12% of the whole percentage of Veterans that die. Mr. Muro says many more Veterans are provided government issued headstones or markers. He seeks the support of the committee and NCA outreach events to increase awareness of burial options and benefits.

New cemetery construction of Phase 1A has been completed at Sacramento Valley; South Florida; Sarasota; Jacksonville; Fort Jackson; Alabama; Bakersfield; and Washington Crossing soon to receive first burials. South Florida Phase B construction includes the columbaria, new administrative building, and maintenance shop. Burials are taking place in the crypts and two new shelters are being used. Lakes had to be put in to leave dry ground (88 acres) for development. NCA expects to have a January 30, 2010 ground breaking/dedication at Miramar for the expansion. Hopefully burials will begin in the summer of 2010.

Jefferson Barracks, the national cemetery that has the highest number of interments per capita, had a projected gravesite depletion of 2015. The medical center has given land that will allow for installing crypts and that pushes the depletion date to about 2025. At Willamette, the purchase of private land will land lock the cemetery but additional land, approximately 300 acres, 30 miles to the south is being negotiated. A donation of 400 acres in the Colorado Springs area will provide secondary space for depleting Ft. Logan. Two sites are under environmental review for Puerto Rico. The site chosen will need approval and then will be developed for a new national cemetery in Puerto Rico. A columbaria and crypts were just added to keep Puerto Rico National Cemetery open.

There is a goal to reduce the 170,000 veteran threshold which will increase the percent of veteran population served within 75 miles of an open national or state veteran's cemetery. It must have OMB approval first. If approved, the change will mean five new national cemeteries.

The timeliness in marking graves continues to improve. In 2002, 49% of headstones and markers were set within 60 days of interment and the average time to mark a grave was 69 days. In 2009, 95% of headstones and markers were set within 60 days of interment and the average time to mark a grave is 24 days. For active duty deaths, the headstone is on-site for the family to see at the time of the burial. For headstones shipped to private cemeteries, the goal was to reduce the timeliness in processing of applications to 20 days. In 2005 NCA was at 13% and in 2009 NCA was at 93%. At a private cemetery in Riverside, California, nine of 92 Civil War confederate and union soldiers graves with historic headstones needed replacement. NCA had replaced all nine headstones in less than 30 days.

A whopping 40% of burials in national cemeteries are cremations so more columbaria are being built to meet that need. The highest percentage of cremation interments are at: Tahoma (68%); Eagle Point (63.7%); Willamette (62.4%); Sacramento Valley (59.1%); NMCA (59%); Florida (57.1%); South Florida (56.9%); Fort Snelling (54.6%); San Joaquin Valley (53.3%); and Santa Fe (53.2%).

100% of NCA Minor, Non-Recurring Maintenance and stimulus (raise and realign projects) went to small disabled Veteran-owned businesses. VA's goal was 10% and VA made 19%. In NCA, 59% of construction projects went to small disabled Veteran-owned businesses. The service disabled Veteran-owned small business goal for VA was 7%; VA made 16%. NCA far exceeded the goal at 55%. So NCA *is* serving our Veterans.

Introduction of VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich

Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Steve Muro had the distinct pleasure of introducing the VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich.

Remarks

Chief of Staff Gingrich explained that his purpose for addressing the committee is because all of the VA advisory committees come under his purview. He first extended thanks for the important work of the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials. He echoed the Secretary's need to first determine the current status of the department, before they can effectively lead in the right direction. There are three key points that the Secretary is stressing when visiting VA offices. Those being: access, conquering homelessness, and fixing the backlog.

Access means becoming the provider of choice. That is in healthcare, in insurance, in home loan guarantees, in education, in memorial affairs, in anything that the VA provides. And NCA is the provider of choice. Access means making VA services accessible to the Veteran. The Chief of Staff said that we need to change performance so that attitudes change.

The Secretary has charged the VA to eliminate Veteran homelessness in the next five years. That means addressing the causes of homelessness; causes like mental illness (which includes substance and alcohol abuse that may or may not stem from PTSD or other disorders), lack of employment opportunities, and lack of education. Currently education benefits apply to higher education. What about the soldier who learned welding in the military and would like to apprentice in a trade rather than seek higher education? Opportunities should be extended that suit the needs of the Veterans at their skill set and in their interest area.

The third challenge is to address the backlog; to fix the process of applying for benefits so that more Veterans are being served. The claims process must be streamlined and brought into the 21st century. Why are we still accepting paper (and not electronic) applications with electronic signatures? To get ahead of the backlog, VA must project what technology will be available in fifteen years to serve the Veteran. The antiquated systems, which do not talk between administrations, need to be replaced with a more sophisticated environment. Implementation of universal enrollment and Virtual Lifelong Electronic Records would be steps in that direction.

Chief of Staff Gingrich concluded by saying the progress in these areas is measurable. The committee took a group photo with the Chief of Staff. The photos were distributed on Wednesday.

Office of General Counsel

Staff Attorney and Deputy Ethics Official Ellen H. Peterson provided the annual Ethics Training for Special Government Employees (SGE) to the committee members. Ms. Peterson defined SGEs as Advisory Committee members appointed to serve not more than 130 days during any 365-day period. She went on to show how the rules for SGEs differ from those of regular federal employees. She provided three means of requesting advice (via telephone, facsimile, and now email). She stressed the importance of

seeking advice *in advance* of taking action to protect SGEs from criminal prosecution or other administrative action in virtually all cases. She told the members that ethics rules apply even when SGEs serve without compensation; ethics rules apply even on days when SGEs are not directly performing government services; that SGEs are government employees but are subject to less restrictive conflict of interest requirements and ethics rules.

As far as financial disclosure, all SGE Advisory Committee members must submit Confidential Financial Disclosures, unless exempted by written DAEO determination. Regular Government Employee members of Advisory Committees should submit reports as well. This Committee should submit a report before our next meeting. The report *must* be certified before the SGE can participate in any deliberative meeting.

According to 18 U.S.C. 208, "It is a crime for you (an SGE) to participate personally and substantially as a government officer or employee in a particular matter which will directly and predictably affect your financial interest or the financial interest imputed to you". Persons whose financial interests are imputed to you include: a spouse; a minor child; a general partner; an organization in which the SGE serves as officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee; or a person or organization the SGE is negotiating with or has arrangement concerning prospective employment. However, SGEs may participate in particular matters of general applicability where the disqualifying financial interest arises from the SGE's non-federal employment or prospective employment; no "special or distinct effect" on SGE or the non-federal employer other than as part of a class; the exception does not cover interest arising from stock; non-federal employment must involve actual employer/employee relationship (not contractor). Other exceptions include: an individual waiver in writing and a multi-campus exception.

The 14 Standards of Conduct principles come down to two main prohibitions: do not use your public office for private gain and do not give unauthorized preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.

Field Operations Update

Associate Director of the Office of Field Programs Lindee Lenox provided a brief update after the thorough presentation by the Acting USMA. No weapons signs with reference to the law governing their prohibition will become more prominent at VA facilities, including national cemeteries. There has been a rise in incidents and the signs are a deterrent. Of course, the "no weapons" law does not apply to honor guards. The intent is to ensure a safe environment for visitors and employees.

Medallion Update

Ms. Lenox publicly recognized and thanked Gina White for her efforts on behalf of the medallion. The Institute of Heraldry came up with designs after soliciting ideas from the Advisory Committee. The folded flag design was preferred. Veteran focus groups

further requested that nine stars (not four) be shown in the design; to add the branch of service; to add more depth and dimension; to place more emphasis on the flag and less on the wreath; and that the stars should be smaller. Bronze (not aluminum) is the recommended material. Ms. Lenox circulated a three inch medallion proto-type to committee members. The three recommended sizes are: five inches, three inches and one and one half inches. The recommended finish is "Veterans" brown paint with a clear gloss coat. Current activities include: a separate application form; IT requirements; updating the NCA website. Future actions include: presentation by the Acting USMA to Secretary for approval; developing contract solicitation and awarding the contract for manufacturing; a spring of 2010 availability date; and promotion through outreach. The Secretary will have final approval. Chairman Kelly noted the influence of the committee on the development of the medallion. He asked that the committee endorse the medallion.

Construction Update

Deputy Director of the Office of Construction Management Bruce Borko provided the NCA construction update. In FY08 there was a sizable increase in the minor construction budget. Mr. Borko attributes that to three reasons: NCA identifying what the construction needs are (prioritization method) so they can be met; NCA management (particularly Steve Muro and Ron Walters who have articulated needs to VA and OMB); and Veterans Service Organizations who have kept the Veterans needs in the forefront of Congressional minds.

The FY09 operating plan consisted of 50 projects. The number actually accomplished was 58. Construction project goals were short seven projects, which will roll over into FY10. Twenty projects are gravesite expansions that will result in approximately 85,000 gravesites. Fifty-six projects are planned in FY10. A sixth Project Manager was hired in FY09 to assist with workload. Thirty-four design projects, eighteen construction projects and four design/build projects will be awarded in FY10. The amount of dollars to be awarded in FY10 is \$63 million.

The Office of Construction Facilities Management (OCFM) handles major projects, which are those that exceed \$10 million. There are 17 active projects (FY09 and prior), 3 budgeted projects (FY10 new starts), and 16 planned projects (FY11 and beyond).

Beginning in 2000, NCA was given the authority to establish twelve new national cemeteries. Three are complete and the other nine are in various stages of construction. In order to accommodate burials within six months of a national cemetery opening, a portion of land is developed for casketed and in-ground cremains. This is known as Phase 1A. Phase 1B is the land that will accommodate burials for the first year and a half. Phase 1B is in construction at the new Alabama National Cemetery. Expected completion is February 2011. Existing cemetery Dallas/Ft. Worth is nearing depletion of Phase 1. Phase 2 of ten-year burial capacity is underway. Expected completion is January 2010. Expansion of depleted Ft. Sam Houston has an expected completion date of October 2010. Phase 1B is expected completion at new Great

Lakes in October of 2010. Phase 1B at South Florida is expected to be completed in June 2010. Phase 1B at Sacramento has just occurred. Washington Crossing is the only cemetery of the twelve that has not yet opened. Planned completion of Phase 1A is expected in December, with first burials in January 2010.

Land Acquisitions in FY09 (which have all been completed) are: Fayetteville; Bakersfield (502.6 acres); Ft. Sam Houston; Lebanon; Ft. Smith; and Cypress Hills. At least five land acquisitions are planned in FY10: Ft. Jackson, Crown Hill, Houston, Port Hudson, Santa Fe, and Camp Nelson.

Budget/Performance Update

Acting Deputy for Memorial Affairs Ron Walters provided the update on budget activities and performance. The President and Congress were both generous to NCA with the FY09 budget. For discretionary accounts, \$343 million was requested and \$464 million was enacted. That was a change of \$121 million, or an increase of 35% over the request. Most notably, NCA received a \$49 million increase in operations and maintenance, which is used to fund contracts for gravesite renovation projects such as raising and realignment, repairing sunken graves and cleaning of headstones and markers. An increase of \$62 million in the minor construction account went far in funding gravesite expansion projects and infrastructure repairs.

With the expected \$250 million funding level in 2010, resources for NCA's operations and maintenance account will have increased by \$89.3 million (56%) in a three-year period. The additional funds were put to good use: a number of new national cemeteries were opened, a number of non-recurring maintenance projects were funded, and an unprecedented amount towards the national shrine commitment. The increase resulted in a very successful execution of the FY09 discretionary budget. NCA spent all but \$2.7 million for operations; awarded contracts totaling \$37.3 million for 44 national shrine gravesite renovation projects; opened five new national cemeteries; awarded \$47.4 million for minor construction, including 16 gravesite expansion projects; and spent \$40 million for 10 projects in the State Cemetery Grants Program (5 grants were awarded for new state Veteran cemeteries). In major construction, approximately \$117 million was awarded for 23 projects. All projects on the operating plan were awarded. This included additional design and construction work for all six new national cemeteries (including Washington Crossing). In addition, NCA began searching for land in Puerto Rico and Willamette to ensure gravesite availability and started the search process for land to replace the national cemetery in Ft. Logan, Colorado.

In addition to other funds, NCA received \$50 million from stimulus monies for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). A total of 395 (ARRA) projects will be funded. As of November 13, 2009, 276 projects have been awarded for 48% or \$24 million. Those projects include: national shrine projects; projects that conserve energy and water; repairs to historic monuments and memorials; projects to repair roads, buildings, and other cemetery infrastructure; and equipment purchases for cemetery operations. When the committee met, NCA was under a second continuing resolution.

It is likely that the enacted FY10 budget will see an increase of \$8 million in operations and maintenance and \$4 million in the State Cemetery Grants Program.

With the opening of the five new national cemeteries, the percent of Veterans served increased from 84.2% in FY08, to 87.4% in FY09. With the opening of Washington Crossing and some state cemeteries, NCA will meet its projected goal of 90% in FY10. The rate of marking graves within 60 days of interment in national cemeteries rose from 93% in FY08 to 95% in FY09. NCA received over 90% of respondents who rate the quality of service and the appearance at cemeteries as excellent. The workload indicators all rose with the exception of the number of headstone and marker applications processed. Because of the opening of new national cemeteries, there were increases in interments, the number of graves maintained, and the number of developed acres maintained.

Remarks

Advisory Committee Chairman Kelly provided the following brief remarks, "The significance of the functioning of the committee yields results." It was evidenced recently in a Congressional hearing before the House VA Committee when asked if the Advisory Committee provides results and if their recommendations are acted upon. Of the sixteen recommendations made, six did not receive action. The reason they did not receive action was because no action was required. They may have been more a statement, rather than a recommendation. It was the Advisory Committee that recommended the feasibility of replacements for the Civil War shield headstones. Those headstones are now available through NCA's Memorial Program Service. More than 500 have been placed in NPS' Andersonville Cemetery. The committee also recommended that the burial allowances be increased to offset the cost of Veteran burials in state Veteran cemeteries under the grant program. A private consulting company looked into it and delivered an evaluation of the burial benefits program in August 2008, which incorporated the review of that process. Other recommendations resulted in increasing funds for state cemeteries, the establishment of a relationship with the Trust for Public Lands, and perhaps most notably, the action taken on the "V" device legislation having evolved into the medallion. Chairman Kelly said he feels the accomplishments of the Advisory Committee have been significant. He offered his thanks for their efforts.

He then announced that Alfred McMichael will be joining the committee as its newest member.

Headstone/Marker Program Update

Acting Director of Memorial Programs Service Don Murphy delivered the next update. He addressed the following two topics: the new regulation (Regulation CFR 38.632 – Headstone and Marker Application Process, signed and published July 1, 2009); and the policy passed in January regarding lithochrome.

The first issue that the regulation addressed is determining who is eligible to apply, which is: the decedent's next-of-kin (NOK); a person authorized in writing by the NOK; or a personal representative authorized in writing by the decedent. The NOK can be defined as: a surviving spouse (including common law); children by age; parents (biological, adoptive, step, foster); brothers/sisters (half, step); grandparents; grandchildren; uncles/aunts; cousins; nieces/nephews; or other lineal descendants. In cases where no lineal NOK is found, the cemetery can act on behalf of the Veteran, if an agreement is in place before the time of need. Also, a funeral home that provided services for the deceased Veteran can act on his/her behalf in lieu of NOK.

The second issue that the regulation addressed is how to request a new emblem of belief. First one must establish that there is an *immediate need* for a government headstone/marker to be furnished for a deceased eligible individual. Immediate need means that a burial has taken place and a headstone or marker is being requested with an emblem that is not among the 38 existing emblems of belief. The second requirement is certification that the proposed new emblem of belief represents the decedent's religious affiliation or sincerely held religious belief system. And finally, a three-inch diameter digitized black and white graphic representation of the requested emblem must be submitted and found to be suitable for inscribing on a government headstone or marker.

Lithochrome Presentation

Don Murphy continued with a presentation concerning the history of lithochroming headstones in national cemeteries. In January NCA passed a policy regarding the lithochrome process that states that at the time a headstone is ordered, NCA will decide whether or not it should be treated with a highlighting agent. Since that time Veterans Service Organizations have voiced concerns over the policy. A pictorial slide show was shown that better illustrated the challenges faced in national cemeteries when headstones that are newly lithochromed are placed in close proximity to those which have not. At the opening of Sacramento National Cemetery the decision was made not to use lithochrome. As lithochrome ages, it fades and becomes unsightly. Also, the fading process is not uniform from one headstone to the next.

The same problem exists with marble niche covers. Again the decision was made not to use lithochroming when the columbarium at Prescott National Cemetery was built. No complaints have been made at any of the new national cemeteries where no lithochrome is used. Lithochroming is still used in active burial sections in national cemeteries in order to preserve consistency.

State Cemetery Grants Service Update

Director Frank Salvias delivered the State Cemetery Grants Service (SCGS) update. The SCGS was established in 1978 and fully authorized in 1980. Because of new legislation, SCGS assists states, territories, and now tribal governments to establish, expand, and improve state and now also tribal government Veteran cemeteries. The

increase in funding to \$42 million in the President's budget allows SCGS to do a better job. It is important that the state cemeteries operate in close comparison to VA national cemeteries. The two newest state cemeteries that opened in 2009 are: Fort Riley, Kansas (March 2, 2009) and Abilene, Texas (June 1, 2009). VA provides 100% of development costs, which includes: architect and engineering fees, administrative fees, construction, equipment, etc. – everything needed to become fully operational except for land acquisition.

The seven cemeteries under construction and opening in 2010 are: Springvale, ME; Ft. Leonard Wood, MO; Spokane, WA; Greenup, KY; Dublin, VA; Newton, MS; and Alliance, NE.

Public Law 109-461 gives NCA the right to process American Indian Tribal Government Grants. Tribal Government Grants are awarded in the same manner as states. It will provide an opportunity to serve more veterans. In FY08, SCGS made first contact with federally recognized tribal governments. There were seven grant preapplications on the FY09 priority list. The FY10 priority list will see three new preapplications. It is anticipated that the first tribal government grant will occur in FY11.

There are four project priority groups. Projects given Priority 1 status are projects for gravesite expansion or improvements that are needed to continue service at an existing Veterans cemetery. Priority 2 projects are for the establishment of new cemeteries. Planned phased gravesite developments prior to need are Priority 3 and Priority 4 projects are other improvements to cemetery infrastructure, such as building expansion and upgrades to roads and irrigation systems. The FY10 priority list consists of: 24 new preapplications, 60 existing preapplications, 32 establish new cemeteries, three new tribal government preapplications, and two nursing home cemeteries.

Operations and maintenance grants is one way to help state Veteran cemeteries achieve shrine status. NCA shrine standards include: the cleanliness of headstones, markers, and niche covers; height and alignment of headstones and markers; leveling gravesites; and turf conditions. The committee would later recommend a certification in conjunction with highly successful triennial reviews to recognize those who meet NCA shrine standards. Failure to meet those standards and receive favorable reports on the triennial review could provide a valid reason to solicit local support of the state cemetery.

Outreach & Communications Update

Chief of Communications and Outreach Support Division Mike Nacincik provided the next update. Each year NCA conducts a robust outreach plan in support of VA memorial benefits. The activities and events are aimed to educate and inform Veterans and their dependents of the burial and memorial benefits provided by VA and to encourage Veterans to make plans to use these benefits at their time of need. The number of national events that NCA participated in has increased from ten in 2007, to 16 in 2008, and 30 in 2009. Since 2007, NCA has been tracking their outreach events

via Management and Decisions Support System (MADSS), unique in VA event reporting. In 2007 NCA Outreach attended 1,581 local events and reached an audience of 203,085, including national events. In 2008 that number rose to 2,792 local events with an audience of 361,559 including national events. In 2009 an audience of 468,948 was reached in combined local and national events. In addition to periodic events, NCA is constantly providing cemetery directors and other staff with promotional items to distribute continuously.

The Women's Advisory Committee approached NCA last year to rally support for women and minority outreach. A fact sheet was created and also posted on the web that links URLs to resources. Information packets were assembled and distributed to every VBA and VHA minority Veteran program coordinator. They then had the resources to be able to talk to their stakeholders about NCA programs.

NCA is now a communications content producer and not just a receiver, as in the past. VA and NCA are moving into digital communication and social media. Traditional methods will not cease, but become integrated with digital and social media venues. New communication resources include: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Second Live, and Mobile. Interactive NCA stories that have links to more information are featured on these sites, as well as photographs. Twitter, a microblog, is limited to 140 characters but provides enough information to capture interest. These resources are interrelated with the NCA website on how outreach provides information. An internal blog for employees is underway as well.

Two new initiatives are: NCA memorial benefits advertising on the National Funeral Directors Association's (NFDA) television show and sponsoring a large mobile exhibit. The television show reaches out to the 35,000 members of NFDA TV, a targeted audience. It will provide a link to the website and a trailer with more information. The mobile exhibit is called Reflections: The American Funeral. It provides a history of funerals in the United States. It includes a large military section that can be modified to incorporate VA memorial benefits, in addition to Arlington National Cemetery.

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

The Committee departed early morning for Baltimore National Cemetery. Director Angela Nash greeted the group upon arrival. A meet and greet followed with cemetery staff, many of the ten were Veterans themselves with many years of dedicated service. The cemetery was beautifully well maintained, having over 44,000 headstones. The Committee toured the grounds and conducted a wreath laying ceremony at the flag. There was a dramatic overlook in close proximity to the flag that was the site of a dedicated plaque to the first through sixth Marine Divisions. Committee members took a group photo there. Members saw first hand, the headstones with and without lithochrome in section R of the cemetery. Baltimore National Cemetery supervises Annapolis National Cemetery and Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery and has two satellite national cemeteries: Annapolis and Loudon Park.

The Committee also toured the lodge, which is being renovated and restored. The lodge boasted all original fixtures, including marble fireplaces and leaded windows that adorned arched cabinets in the dining room. The high ceilings added to the spaciousness and warmth of the lodge. Outside, the lodge that once had a wrap-around porch now has a six-columned porch with brand new shiny copper gutters and drain spouts.

The Committee also toured the nearby historic Loudon National Cemetery that was established in 1862. Many of those buried are Civil War era Veterans. The over 7,000 gravesites appeared perfect due to a total raise and realign project and fresh sod, completed with stimulus funds. The cemetery also has a Meigs Lodge and several monuments.

Public Comment

No comments from the public.

Arlington National Cemetery Update

Superintendent Jack Metzler provided an update On Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). ANC received not only the President and First Lady on Veterans Day, but also the Vice-President and his wife. Mr. Metzler distributed a copy of "Children of Valor", a book that is presented to the service-members families of those killed on active duty and interred in ANC.

In FY09 there were a total of 6,959 funerals. Of that number 4,117 were in-ground burials (2,446 casketed and 1,671 cremations). The number of columbarium inurnments was 2,842. A large number (4,513 or 65%) of the total funerals were cremations.

The Navy Annex will no longer be in use after 2012. ANC is working with the Washington Headquarters Service to develop a master plan for the remediation of the property.

U.S. Army Veteran Senator Kennedy's funeral was held at ANC. The grave was marked with a white wooden cross on the same night of the private funeral. MPS provided the foot marker within two days of the request, in anticipation of the tourists wanting to pay their respects.

National Park Service Update

Superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site Brad Bennett spoke next. He told the Committee that most (12 of 14) of the national cemeteries under the care of the National Park Service (NPS) are in historic sites associated with the Civil War. NCA Historian Sara Amy Leach pointed out that more than half (72 of 130) of NCA cemeteries have historic features too, dating back to the 1870s. Most of the historic

NPS cemeteries are closed to new burials. Andersonville remains the most active with more than 160 funeral services annually. Thanks to Stimulus funds through ARRA, 500 headstones were cleaned, realigned, and replaced in 2009 at Andersonville. The Cultural Landscape Inventory, which will document historically significant features of the cemetery and prison site, underscore historic preservation priorities, and provide justification for funding requests, is being completed in 2010. Also at Andersonville, a professional storyteller will portray Clara Barton and travel to area schools to bring history to life. Press releases will be disseminated to solicit greater participation in the Wreaths Across America program. The biggest event at Andersonville happens on National POW/MIA Recognition Day in September when Rolling Thunder sponsors travel for 200 or more participants to connect with at least 500 in the park. The second largest special event at Andersonville is Memorial Day during which time Boy Scouts place some 20,000 small flags at gravesites to honor each Veteran. In March the third largest special event will occur during the Living History Weekend in which living historians represent Civil War scenes from 1864 – 1865, Camp Sumter (or Andersonville Prison). For those who cannot travel to Georgia, a traveling exhibition, which will tour in 2011 and having more than 1,000 oral histories and unique artifacts, is being developed by NPS, Friends of Andersonville, and American Ex-Prisoners of War.

At Custer National Cemetery, the only NPS cemetery in the west, there were 20 reservation interments last year. The cemetery is on Crow Indian Reservation and faces irrigation challenges. One of the smallest NPS cemeteries, Battleground National Cemetery in Washington, DC's Rock Creek Park has a circular pattern of 40 Union soldiers' graves. Their wooden grave markers were later replaced with marble ones. Recently, 5 misidentified graves were corrected. Poplar Grove National Cemetery at Petersburg National Battlefield is another Civil War site. More than 6,000 Union soldiers are laid to rest there. They recently completed a Cultural Landscape Report which will be available soon. They have a partnership in education, research, and special programs with the city of Petersburg Cemetery. Their burial records and marker photographs are available on-line, which is a particularly great resource for those who do not live in close proximity to the location. Gettysburg National Cemetery is undergoing major fence restoration and, like most NPS sites, is very involved with interpretive programs. Chalmette, which was heavily damaged by Hurricane Katrina, is home to more than 15,000 headstones from the Battle of New Orleans. The masonry on the historic cemetery wall is being repaired at Stones River National Cemetery of Tennessee. At Andrew Johnson, also in Tennessee, experimentation with slow-growing grass to curtail mowing frequency is underway as well as the use of gentle cleaning agents for the headstones.

Congressman Steven Buyer, Ranking Minority Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, has said that the NPS cemeteries "need to be brought to higher standards". In response, NPS reviewed four of its cemeteries: Stones River, Fort Donelson, Andrew Johnson, and Andersonville. The report is still working through final approval. There was a Congressional Oversight Hearing in September, in which Congressman Buyer offered to approach appropriations on behalf of NPS for additional funding. At that time he also retracted his threat to turn NPS national cemeteries over to NCA. Also, in

October, seven of the 14 NPS cemeteries were represented along with NCA and other state, municipal, and private cemeteries at the Nationwide Cemetery Preservation Summit. After the meeting at hand, those gathered took advantage of the opportunity and held a post-conference solutions meeting. For the long-term, making sure that standards are agreed upon and then addressing the resources needed to meet that standard, all 14 NPS cemeteries have been invited to the first NPS National Cemetery Strategic Summit in December. Participants will discuss and agree on policy, practices, and an action plan for addressing preservation and operational priorities.

American Battle Monuments Commission Update

Director of Engineering and Maintenance Tom Sole provided the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) update. When ABMC commemorates or honors the Armed Forces, it provides exceptional standards in terms of facilities and services. It has earned them the gold standard in terms of maintenance. The other mission is “to tell the story”, to provide the history of what deeds were performed that merit the commemoration and honor. NPS holds the gold standard for interpretation. NCA, ANC, NPS, and ABMC all have different missions and a different focus so it’s difficult to compare and contrast.

The exhibit design is underway at Point du Hoc. It consists of minimal use of exhibits in the building with an emphasis on touring the battlefield. The web version of the interactive combat narrative is available now on their site. It was completed before the onsite version, which will take longer of course to develop. The Olympics will be in England in 2012. The Cambridge Interpretive Center is being made ready to accommodate the increased number of visitors that the Olympics will generate. Then the Sicily-Rome cemetery will be focused on and lastly, there is a goal to finish Oise-Aisne before the World War I centennial.

Mr. Sole then showed the Committee a draft of the interactive film from Pointe du Hoc, a poignant portrayal of actual heroes who lived to tell their moving accounts and those of their comrades who did not survive. The stories are dramatic oral histories brought to life by the retelling of the first hand experiences of those men. The film was a touching tribute to those who served.

Committee Business Session

Old Business

The minutes from the Spring meeting were approved.

Recap of Recommendations and Endorsements from May 2009 Advisory Committee Meeting in Texas

Recommendation 1: The Committee encourages the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to seek out opportunities through applicable government business

practices to make use of programs, such as the Veterans Employment Agency (VEA) and those like and similar to it, to make use of services of challenged Veterans recovery programs to accomplish headstone inscription work and related services. The Committee applauds the accomplishments of VEA and NCA in partnering for this mutually beneficial work.

VA Response: Concur. The successful partnership between NCA and VEA and also Veterans Health Administration's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program is a shining example of how VA rehabilitation programs help Veterans transition to being participatory members of our society. NCA has worked with the Veterans Benefits Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Service to employ Veterans through the "Coming Home to Work" and "Non-Paid Work Experience" programs, and has set a goal within the Memorial Service Networks to employ a minimum of five Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans. NCA is committed to continuing and expanding these partnerships, and also to taking advantage of other opportunities to employ Veterans seeking to return to meaningful employment.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends to the VA to seek Congress to amend public law 110-157 to clarify that privately marked graves not include graves in national, State or service academy headstones and to amend the act to prohibit the use of the medallion for other than the authorized or intended purposes.

VA Response: Concur in principal. The current law in section 2306(d)(1) of title 38, United States Code, states that "the Secretary shall furnish, when requested, an appropriate Government headstone or marker at the expense of the United States for the grave of an individual [eligible for burial in a national cemetery but not buried there, or any individual entitled to retired pay under chapter 1223 of title 10] who is buried in a private cemetery, notwithstanding that the grave is marked by a headstone or marker furnished at private expense." Section 2306(d)(4) further states "in lieu of furnishing a headstone or marker under this subsection, the Secretary may furnish, upon request, a medallion...."

However, to address the Committee's concern and to advise the public of the new benefit requirements, VA will clarify in all relevant materials, VA Web sites and on the new medallion application form, that medallions may only be placed on privately-purchased headstones and markers in private cemeteries.

New Business

New Recommendations

The following recommendations were motioned and seconded.

Recommendation 1: That NCA establish a national shrine certification process with ABMC, Arlington National Cemetery, the National Park Service, and state veterans

cemeteries in conjunction with NCA's triennial reviews. That upon validation of achieving national shrine status NCA will award an appropriate certificate or plaque and that such status be reviewed on a triennial basis.

Recommendation 2: The committee endorses and supports the 21st century initiatives presented by VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich during the meeting.

Recommendation 3: The committee endorses Memorial Program Service's design for the bronze medallion presented to the committee and recommends that this medallion be adopted by the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs for recommendation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Recommendation 4: The committee endorses NCA's Lithochrome policy dated January 16, 2009.

It was requested that the spring meeting of the Advisory Committee be held in South Dakota or Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX. The tentative meeting dates are Tuesday and Wednesday, May 18 – 19, 2010 or Tuesday and Wednesday, June 1 - 2, 2010. The meeting was adjourned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Nacincik", written in a cursive style.

Michael Nacincik
Designated Federal Officer